

## The Deformation of Ukrainian Folk Culture during the Holodomor Years

The Holodomor of 1932–33—a result of the functioning of the dictatorial, totalitarian Soviet regime—is the greatest tragedy ever to befall the Ukrainian people. The physical annihilation of civilian inhabitants of the Ukrainian SSR and the destruction by the Bolshevik regime of all spheres of traditional Ukrainian culture are nothing other than genocide. It was precisely in 1932–33 that the deformation, denationalization, and homogenization of Ukrainian culture took place, as a result of which there was a break in the continuity of folk traditions, and the natural development of traditional Ukrainian culture was disrupted.

Today, when one of the main tasks of our state is the revival and preservation of our nation's cultural traditions, it is crucial to study and record the consequences of the fracturing of traditional Ukrainian culture during the Holodomor years. Since the late 1980s, scholars have produced a substantial number of studies—in particular demographic, economic, and political—that explore various aspects of this tragedy. The ethnographic aspect is usually mentioned only in passing.

The noted British historian Robert Conquest was the first to make broad generalizations on the consequences of the destruction of traditional culture in the Ukrainian countryside.<sup>1</sup> A number of deformations, particularly moral and ethical ones, are pointed out in a study written in the Ukrainian diaspora by Dmytro Solovei, an eyewitness of the Holodomor.<sup>2</sup> In 1986–89, under the directorship of the American historian James Mace,<sup>3</sup> the specially established U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine collected a large number of sources for future research on this topic.

In the early 1990s, the two founders of the Association of Holodomor Researchers, Liudmyla Kovalenko-Maniak and her husband, Volodymyr Maniak,<sup>4</sup> devoted some attention to the issue of the ethnocultural break in Ukraine.

A unique work by the American ethnomusicologist William Noll<sup>5</sup> made an important contribution to research on the traditional culture of the Ukrainian peasantry in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The author concluded that collectivization fundamentally destroyed the authentic customs, leisure activities, and rituals of the Ukrainian peasantry, characterizing it as a cultural catastrophe.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), translated as Robert Konkvest, *Zhnyva skorboty: Radians'ka kolektyvizatsiia i holodomor* (Kyiv, 1993); *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice*, ed. Robert Conquest, Soviet Studies Series (London: The Bodley Head, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> D. Solovei, *Skazaty pravdu: Try pratsi pro holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv*, ed. Iurii Shapoval and Oleksandr Iurenko (Kyiv and Poltava: NAN Ukraïny; In-t politychnykh i etnonatsional'nykh doslidzhen'; Tsentr istorychnoi politolohii, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Commission on the Ukraine Famine, *Investigation of the Ukrainian Famine 1932–1933: Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> 33-ii: *Holod: Narodna Knyha-Memorial*, comp. L. Kovalenko and V. Maniak (Kyiv, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Vil'iam Noll [William Noll], *Transformatsiia hromadians'koho suspil'stva: Usna istoriia ukraïns'koï selians'koï kul'tury 1920–1930-kh rokiv* (Kyiv, 1999).

A substantial number of questions that have received scant attention from historians and ethnographers are raised in an article by S.I. Drovoziuk.<sup>6</sup> In his monograph, *Natsional'no-kul'turne ta dukhovne zhyttia ukrains'koho selianstva u 20–30-kh rr. XX stolittia: istoriohrafichnyi narys* (The National Cultural and Spiritual Life of the Ukrainian Peasantry in the 1920s and 1930s: A Historiographic Survey), published in Vinnytsia in 2005, the author emphasized the crucial need for fundamental research on the functioning of traditional folk culture under a totalitarian regime; the “encounter” and interaction between Ukrainian folk and Soviet cultures; and the impact of repressive measures on the cultural and spiritual life of the Ukrainian peasantry, as well as on ethical and moral standards.

Crucial to conducting thorough research on the destruction of traditional Ukrainian culture is the enlistment of a wide array of archival materials that differ in terms of provenance and the potential information that they offer. In this regard, declassified documents preserved in the Branch State Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine (HDA SBU), along with other sources and materials, help reveal a general picture of the destruction that was wreaked on traditional Ukrainian culture during the Holodomor.

Famine was already raging in Ukraine from the beginning of 1932. People were abandoning their villages en masse and boarding trains in search of salvation for themselves and their families. The historian Illia Shulha emphasizes that peasants were forbidden to leave even the confines of their villages. However, despite this travel ban, thousands of exhausted men, women, and children swollen from starvation edema roamed the streets of towns and cities, heading for train stations in hopes of finding some food and surviving. At the train stations, peasants were fined and turned back. In order to prevent Ukrainian peasants from fleeing en masse to other Soviet republics, especially Russia and Belarus, “a solid barrier manned by armed personnel was erected along the borders of Ukraine, where entire villages were dying out. And Lazar Kaganovich personally made sure that Ukrainian men with sacks were not allowed on trains.”<sup>7</sup>

Official documents confirm the planned nature of these actions of the Soviet authorities, which were intended to prevent starving peasants from leaving Ukraine. For example, a secret directive sent by the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine (hereafter CC CP[B]U) to the Plenipotentiary of the People’s Commissariat of Transportation Routes bans the sale of train tickets to peasants without certificates issued by an RVK (raion [county] executive committee) seeking to leave the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the Ukrainian-Russian and Ukrainian-Belarusian borders and all railways were patrolled by GPU (secret police) operatives who turned people back. Those who managed to continue their journey were not permitted to leave train stations upon arriving on the pretext that they not spread filth and sickness throughout the city.

The passport system was also introduced at this time. However, peasants were not issued passports, which further hindered flight from their villages in search of a livelihood.

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<sup>6</sup> S. Drovoziuk, “Narodna kul'tura v umovakh utverdzhennia totalitarnoho rezhymu v Ukraïni u 20–30 rr. XX st.: istoriohrafiiia problemy,” in *Naukovi zapysky Vinnyts'koho derzhavnoho pedahohichnoho universytetu*, Serii: Istoriiia, vyp. 5 (Vinnytsia, 2003), 234–40.

<sup>7</sup> 33-ii: *Holod*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kykh ob'iednan' Ukraïny (hereafter TsDAHO Ukraïny), f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6273, ark. 51.

In the second half of 1932, migration became a mass phenomenon. People sold their property or simply abandoned it and went off to search for jobs in Ukraine's industrial centers: to the mines of the Donbas region and construction sites in Dnipropetrovsk. An endless stream of people—tens of thousands—left the villages in search of sustenance: some because they had been evicted from their homes and others to avoid joining a collective farm and death by starvation.

Official documents confirm the mass character of these migration processes. For example, between October and December 1932, 49,250 peasants fled from the villages of Kharkiv oblast—16,634 of them members of collective farms and 31,616 independent farmers.<sup>9</sup> Peasants departed mostly at night in order to avoid being detained. As a result, in keeping with a directive issued by Vsevolod Balytsky [the plenipotentiary in Ukraine of the Joint State Political Directorate or OGPU], on the night of 24 January 1933 an inspection operation was launched at ten of the largest train stations in Kharkiv oblast. At five of them, 442 people were detained. The GPU then issued a directive ordering county-level officials to conduct such operations at all railway stations. The oblast militia and the OGPU were ordered to erect blockades on rural roads and enlist local activists in the struggle against the mass exodus of peasants.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet government characterized the peasants' desperate attempts to flee the famine as "kulak sabotage." This put a halt to the issuance of certificates and attestations by local rural soviets. Pickets were set up in villages at night, their purpose being to stop anyone leaving the settlements.

In the fall of 1932, people took practically their all new clothing, embroidered shirts and towels, and kerchiefs from their homes and headed to cities or across the border to exchange them for food. Many peasants were fleeced in these dealings. For example, a woman in Cherkasy province bartered her finest kerchief for a small bag of buckwheat that actually contained seeds of corncockle [a common weed that infested European wheat fields—Trans.] covered with a layer of buckwheat; her husband received a bag of millet that contained ashes.<sup>11</sup> Such incidents infuriated the peasants. As a result, they developed psychological disorders such as despair, anxiety, sadness, and depression, which wreaked untold damage on the physical and psychological health of the Ukrainian peasantry.

After a while, even this option for acquiring food was lost to Ukrainian peasants when the Soviet authorities resolved to confiscate items that could be bartered. Activists who carried out dekulakization sold the appropriated clothing, footwear, and agricultural implements or divided them among themselves. They ripped up items that they did not need and smashed crockery.

It should be explained here who these activists were. They were people with absolutely no standing among their fellow villagers, mostly landless, impoverished peasants whose mode of behavior was utterly amoral and who volunteered to join the ranks of Soviet activists in the countryside for a variety of reasons: greed for other people's property, inflamed feelings of class hatred, personal revenge, fanatical devotion to the Soviet authorities, and even fear for their own well-being. The ranks of rural activists often included individuals who wanted to curry favor

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<sup>9</sup> TsDAHO Ukraïny, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6273, ark. 46.

<sup>10</sup> TsDAHO Ukraïny, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 6273, ark. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Arkhiv Mizhnarodnoho blahodiinoho fondu "Ukraïna 3000" (hereafter Arkhiv MBF), f. 18, ch. 2, spr. 35, ark. 216<sup>v</sup>.

with the leadership sent by the NKVD (secret police). A female resident of Cherkasy province recalled the ferocity of one such rural activist: “Baiuk’s forelock was never dry; he harassed people so much that he would break out in a sweat.”<sup>12</sup> Such activists were readily taken into the service of the Communist Party.

Thus the physical destruction of the peasantry went hand in hand with psychological terror. NKVD officials, together with leading village activists, behaved wantonly toward people. This is corroborated by documents preserved at TsDAHO Ukraïny (Central State Archive of Public Organizations of Ukraine) and marked “Top Secret.” One such document records the following: “Snihur, the head of the village soviet, gathered activists around himself—drunkards who behaved arbitrarily.”<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the refusal of any village activist to carry out the orders of an authorized representative was treated as desertion. One way or another, these people were doomed. As documents published by the historian Volodymyr Serhiichuk<sup>14</sup> attest, many of these activists were themselves later tried and convicted.

The confiscation of grain from the peasantry was accompanied by severe psychological stress. So-called brigades were created: headed by a specially authorized county official, they went from house to house smashing millstones and chopping mortars into pieces. Large numbers of millstones were confiscated. According to the Ukrainian diaspora scholar I. Kubynets, 27 and 75 mills were confiscated in Lubny and Tsarychansk counties, Poltava province, respectively, and 100 millstones were confiscated in Sloviansk county in the Kharkiv region.<sup>15</sup> Searching for grain, members of these brigades smashed dishware, tore clothing apart, and threw out cooked “food.” A memorandum sent by the editorial board of the newspaper *Radians'ke selo* (Soviet Village) to Stanislaw Kosior noted that “activists often settle personal accounts; they take revenge on individual collective farm members for their previous criticism.”<sup>16</sup> In order to ferret out where the peasants had hidden grain, activists carried out interrogations—even of children—during which they broke their arms, beat them mercilessly, deprived them of food and water, and then surreptitiously buried the bodies of their innocent victims. There were many such incidents. Physical violence involving bodily harm and murder became the standard behavior of specially authorized NKVD officials and activists in Ukrainian villages during the period of collectivization and the Holodomor.

Peasants from whom nothing more could be confiscated, and who were exhausted by starvation, were mocked by these activists. For example, the practice of hanging wooden signs inscribed with insults on the gates of peasant farmsteads was widespread: “Marichka is an idler” (because the woman in question, who was spent from prolonged starvation, could not go to the field to work);<sup>17</sup> “A person who maliciously holds back grain lives here.” Thousands of peasants were branded as “counterrevolutionaries,” “foreign lackeys,” and the like. It was forbidden to remove these signs and take them inside for safekeeping. To make matters worse, a peasant had

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<sup>12</sup> Arkhiv MBF, f. 18, ch. 2, spr. 35, ark. 215.

<sup>13</sup> TsDAHO Ukraïny, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5243, ark. 1.

<sup>14</sup> V. Serhiichuk, *Iak nas moryly holodom*, 3d exp. ed. (Kyiv, 2006), 92–102.

<sup>15</sup> D. Solovei, *Holhota Ukraïny*, pt. 1, *Moskovs'ko-bol'shevyts'kyi okupatsiïnyi teror v URSR mizh Pershoiu i Druhoiu svitovoiu viinoiu* (Winnipeg, 1953), 68.

<sup>16</sup> TsDAHO Ukraïny, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5300, ark. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Testimony of A. P. Nikolaichuk, b. 1919, village of Markushi, Berdychiv raion, Zhytomyr oblast. Arkhiv Natsional'noho muzeiu “Memorial zhertv Holodomoru” (Kyiv).

to stay awake the whole night making sure that the sign did not disappear, for a missing sign meant a fine of 100 *karbovantsi* (rubles).

People were forced to carry a flag made of bast matting through the village. “Slogans were attached to the ailing fifty-eight-year-old peasant Smertiuk; a bag of broken crockery was hung across his shoulder; instead of a drum, he was given a pail. The man could not endure such humiliation and hanged himself.”<sup>18</sup> For failing to meet grain-procurement quotas, families were forced to separate.<sup>19</sup> Such violent actions degraded people’s dignity and instilled submissiveness, forbearance, and a fear of official representatives. They gave rise to a moral ambiguity that pervaded their existence, grinding people down through the abuses meted out to them and the impunity of those who were maltreating them.

The Holodomor produced and kept perpetuating a number of social phenomena that continued to exert a negative influence on the spiritual life of the Ukrainian people long afterward. One of these phenomena was the writing of denunciations, which was encouraged on all administrative levels. An amoral measure introduced by Soviet authorities during this period was that of rewarding denunciations. An individual who revealed where a neighbor had concealed grain would receive a premium of between 10 and 15 percent of what was uncovered. This 10–15 percent reward, practically the only salvation from starvation, compelled people to come forward and denounce their neighbors. In turn, fear and the oppressive atmosphere surrounding these accusations spurred peasants to become the first to issue denunciations. According to H. Kapustian, it was not just people who had made “anti-Soviet” remarks who ended up in the labor camps of the GULAG, but also those who had been present during conversations in which such remarks had been made but had not reported them to the proper authorities.<sup>20</sup> A certain proportion of denunciations were utterly baseless. People had been intimidated to such a degree that in some villages collective-farm granaries and fields were not even guarded. Fear gave rise to moral malleability and was transformed into the daily pattern of people’s existence. The massive spread of denunciations could not fail to affect the psychological state of the peasantry, leading to the rise of negative feelings of depression, despondence, rage, irritation, and a sense of doom.

Fear was so all-pervasive that peasants who had grain buried in a secret hiding place occasionally starved to death without having had recourse to their supplies simply because they were afraid that someone would see something and denounce them to the authorities.<sup>21</sup> The powerful sense of fear even compelled peasants to violate what was most sacred—familial ties—and denounce members of their own families, including parents, husbands, and wives.

The Soviet authorities also resorted to such methods as bribery and the practice of pitting one person against another. They imposed their morality, will, and intellectual level on people residing in the same village. Thus the Holodomor caused demoralization on a mass scale. Denunciations ceased to be regarded as something disgraceful; on the contrary, they were

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<sup>18</sup> I. Shul’ha, *Liudomor na Podilli* (Kyiv, 1993), 72.

<sup>19</sup> Derzhavnyi arkhiv Vinnyts’koi oblasti (hereafter DAVO), f. 136, op. 6, od. zb. 11, 12, 41, 64.

<sup>20</sup> H. Kapustian, “Holod i selians’ka mental’nist’,” in *Holod-henotsyd 1933 r. v Ukraïni: istoriko-politologichnyi analiz sotsial’no-demografichnykh ta moral’no-psykholohichnykh naslidkiv*; *Mizhn. nauk.-teor. konf.*, Kyiv, 28 lyst. 1998 r., 183.

<sup>21</sup> Testimony of Iu. F. Berezny, b. 1933, village of Brovky Pershi, Andrushivka raion, Zhytomyr oblast. Arkhiv Natsional’noho muzeiu “Memorial zhertv Holodomoru” (Kyiv).

promoted and urged by the authorities as patriotic actions. As a result, people began to regard one another with suspicion.

The Soviet authorities applied a whole array of measures that led to the moral disintegration of society. In particular, the journalist Fedir Pigido-Pravoberezhnyi noted that children were taught to denounce their parents<sup>22</sup> and report what they talked about at home, thus cultivating in children a “taste” for denunciation and eavesdropping from an early age.

The hopelessness of the situation in Ukraine during the Holodomor of 1932–33 forced peasants to engage in petty thievery. Archival documents and eyewitness testimonies make it possible to assess the risks that people were willing to take in their search for food. Collective-farm fields and granaries were guarded, and the guards (village activists or soldiers dispatched from the county center) were ordered to fire at will in order to protect the foodstuffs. As a result, shootings and killings without trial were widespread.

Petty theft began to become commonplace in the course of the Holodomor of 1932–33. As the ethnographer H. Horyn has perceptively noted, an untraditional attitude to ownership began to develop at this time, and slogans about state ownership and the people’s property began to be understood by a new generation as pertaining to “goods belonging to no one.” Thus, “according to Soviet morality, unlawful appropriation was not perceived as theft.”<sup>23</sup> Upon joining collective farms, peasants were still unable to protect their families from hunger, as their wages were paid in the form of days off. In an effort to save themselves from starving to death, collective-farm members picked fodder beets, rotten potatoes, leftover carrots, and the like, concealing them in their bootlegs. Over the years, stealing on collective farms came to be perceived as “compensation” for unpaid workdays and later became so commonplace that a new term was coined—*nesuny* (carriers).

During the harvest of 1933, the Soviet authorities increased their pressure on peasants and collective-farm members. Besides the special agitation brigades sent into the Ukrainian countryside to promote mass activity on collective farms, circuit court sessions were held to conduct on-the-spot trials. For example, in Zaporizhia province four peasants were sentenced to eight and ten years’ imprisonment for “theft of collective-farm grain,” and all their property was confiscated, while the head of the collective farm was given a five-year sentence for “abetting.”<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that heads of collective farms were frequently victimized by the totalitarian government simply because they had helped people working in the fields or rendered assistance to underage orphans.

The Soviet authorities deliberately created conditions in which social and legal standards were stripped of all meaning. The deformation of these norms is illustrated by the spread of summary justice during the Holodomor, which was applied to people who had tried in various ways to obtain food for themselves and their families. There emerged a kind of mass hatred, apathy, and desensitization that prompted a wave of unprecedented cruelty. Government officials resorted to brutal punishments, including the killing of people who had made even the slightest

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<sup>22</sup> F. Pravoberezhnyi, *8,000,000: 1933-i rik na Ukraïni* (Winnipeg, 1951), 49.

<sup>23</sup> H. Horyn, “Holodomor 1932–33 rokiv—nyshchivnyi udar po fundamental'nykh ustroiakh tradytsiinoho ukladu zhyttia ukraïns'koho sela,” in *Vidlunnia holodomoru-henotsydu 1932–1933: Etnokul'turni naslidky holodomoru v Ukraïni* (Lviv, 2005), 117.

<sup>24</sup> TsDAHO Ukraïny, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 5846, ark. 110.

effort to find something nourishing to eat. Judicial and extrajudicial bodies committed outrages against peasants with impunity and inflicted beatings on children who had picked a few ears of grain from a collective-farm field. No one was punished for these crimes and incidents of extrajudicial acts perpetrated even against children as young as six or seven. To the contrary, they were useful to the authorities, since no documentation was maintained and no traces of these crimes remained in the NKVD archives.

There were a great many examples of such brutality, and neither young nor old were spared, which was contrary to the people's traditional morals and code of conduct. There were cases where children were thrown into prison for theft. At one time, for example, of the 639 prisoners in the Mohyliv-Podil'skyi jail, 24 were children.<sup>25</sup>

In many cases, government officials did not go to the trouble of sending people to prison but killed them on the spot, without benefit of investigation or trial. Such actions stemmed from Bolshevik deformation of the people's sense of justice. A characteristic feature of this debased legal consciousness was confidence in the legality and impunity of actions vis-à-vis that part of the peasantry that the authorities had proclaimed a class enemy.

The Holodomor of the early 1930s led to the psychological ruination of the Ukrainian ethnos. Because of the famine, people began to suffer from various psychological disorders. This resulted in an increase in the suicide rate during the Holodomor. Those who committed suicide were typically women whose husbands had been arrested and sent to labor camps or who had lost their children. Some peasants were so weak from starvation that even if they wanted to die sooner, they lacked the strength to take their own lives. A resident of Polychentsi, a village in Vinnytsia province, relates: "I was so feeble that I could not tear the sleeve off a shirt and fashion a rope out of it; that's how I remained alive."<sup>26</sup>

The most horrific consequences of the Holodomor involved cases of suicide among children who had lost their parents and had no assistance whatever from the authorities because they had been branded as "children of kulaks."

Starvation addled people's minds: there were isolated cases where children fell victim to violence at the hands of their parents. Archival materials contain dossiers on parents who deliberately killed their children "so that they would not suffer."

The Holodomor broke down people's personalities, and irreversible psychological changes took place in their bodies: the sphere of emotions was deformed and traditional morality destroyed. Thus, another phenomenon that emerged as a result of starvation-induced psychological damage was looting, inasmuch as a psychologically healthy individual is incapable of this type of activity. A resident of the Mykolaiv region, T. S. Matviichuk, once watched a boy dig up the coffin of a teacher from a grave and then take off his suit in order to barter it for food.<sup>27</sup> Quite often the so-called corpse gatherers, who traveled around on wagons collecting dead bodies and bringing them to a cemetery for burial in a common grave, engaged in looting.

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<sup>25</sup> I. Shul'ha, *Holod na Podilli: Do 60-richchia holodomoru 1933 r.* (Vinnytsia, 1993), 139.

<sup>26</sup> Testimony of I. N. Shved, b. 1923, village of Polychentsi, Koziatyn raion, Vinnytsia oblast. Arkhiv Natsional'noho muzeiu "Memorial zhertv Holodomoru" (Kyiv).

<sup>27</sup> *Holod-henotsyd 1932–1933 rokiv na Mykolaivshchyni, pohliady istoriykiv, ochevydtsiv, arkhivni materialy* (Mykolaiv, 2003), 153.

According to eyewitness statements, these gatherers would undress the corpses and keep their clothing for themselves.<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that such amoral acts were unknown in the Ukrainian countryside prior to the Holodomor.

Within the broad spectrum of psychological disorders caused by the famine, the most horrific one was the total destruction of the human psyche, which led to cases of people consuming the flesh of corpses and cannibalism. That these were isolated instances is confirmed by a number of studies on the Holodomor in which a substantial number of eyewitnesses from several neighboring villages would recount one and the same such incident. Whenever this sort of terrible act occurred, it so angered the peasants that they remembered it for a long time and recounted it to others. This is attested by various eyewitness statements, such as: “I know that all the neighbors were afraid to go outside the confines of the village because it was said that in the neighboring village a man was committing acts of cannibalism.”<sup>29</sup>

There were other cases that also stemmed from a deranged psyche. For example, parents, in an effort to save their children, deliberately proposed that their flesh be eaten after they died. A woman from the village of Petrykivka in Dnipropetrovsk province recounted: “When Mother was dying, she said: ‘Kill me, then you’ll have something to eat.’”<sup>30</sup>

Cases of cannibalism, which took place mainly during the first six months of 1933, angered people and spread mistrust and fear among the peasants. There were instances in which the residents of a village dispensed mob justice to cannibals, as their victims were primarily children. Acts of cannibalism perceptibly altered the system of values, and people began to reconcile themselves to the sort of deeds and actions that, until recently, had been absolutely unacceptable.

In late 1929, following the announcement, at the November plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik), of total collectivization through the complete liquidation of the Ukrainian peasantry’s private land ownership, a network of state and collective farms began to form throughout the country. The modern technology they offered was to be a drawing card for luring the peasantry onto such farms as quickly as possible. Faced with such new methods of production, individual farmers, with their traditional concept of property rights (represented by the *mezha*, or a thin strip of land dividing land holdings), had to yield. Peasants felt alienated and were loath to join collective farms. This comes as no surprise, given that the mindset of Ukrainian peasants, reflected in such sayings as “The *mezha* is sacred” and “Whoever violates the *mezha* will not live out his days to the full,”<sup>31</sup> was firmly established and inflexible.

Local authorities undertook agitation among the peasants, forcing them to join collective farms, communes, and cooperatives by various methods: economic (fines, taxes); legal (loss of rights); administrative (deportation); extraordinary (forcible confiscation of grain reserves); and

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<sup>28</sup> Arkhiv MBF, f. 20, spr. 13, ark. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Testimony of N. V. Maikovska, b. 1921, village of Vilenka, Korostyshiv raion, Zhytomyr oblast. Arkhiv Natsional’noho muzeiu “Memorial zhertv Holodomoru” (Kyiv)

<sup>30</sup> Testimony of N. A. Dzhereleiko, b. 1915, village of Yelyzavetivka, Tsarychanka raion, Dnipropetrovsk oblast Arkhiv Natsional’noho muzeiu “Memorial zhertv Holodomoru” (Kyiv).

<sup>31</sup> Manuscript collection of the M. Rylsky Institute of Art History, Folklore, and Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (hereafter RF IMFE NANU), f. 9, spr. 29, ark. 56–58.



criminal. Hanna Mykolaivna Panchenko (b. 1927), a resident of the village of Ozerne in the Kyiv region, affirms that village activists, including her own mother, were forced to agitate among the peasants until they agreed to join the collective farm.<sup>32</sup> For example, as a result of intimidation, arrests, and various kinds of administrative pressure, 3,841 farms in Bar county, Vinnytsia province, were collectivized over a period of seven days.<sup>33</sup>

Blackmail and threats were a widespread method of “agitation.” During this kind of agitation, a pistol always lay close by on a table. Peasants who still refused to join the collective farm were equated with criminals.

Eyewitness testimonies indicate that some peasants preferred to perish in their own holdings rather than join a collective farm. During all-out collectivization, many peasant farmers were deported to Siberia as enemies of the people for refusing to join a collective farm. Most eyewitnesses are sympathetic to those who were dekulakized, calling them “toilers” and “master farmers.” Despite oppression and persecution, the peasants championed their right to farm independently to the bitter end.

Special attention should be paid to peasant attitudes regarding the establishment of collective farms. Substantial numbers of peasants considered them a diabolical invention and refused to join collective farms for religious reasons. The journalist L. Kovalenko<sup>34</sup> cites a number of facts revealing the prevalence of apocalyptic moods. The scholar O. Hanzha has written about an apathy toward agriculture that emerged among the peasantry.<sup>35</sup>

The radical reform of age-old traditions of agricultural work was painful for the peasants. Most of them rejected collectivization and resisted it. The Bolshevik regime never managed to overcome the psychological barrier between collective and individual farming. With the escalation of the offensive against the Ukrainian countryside, when even military force was brought into play, the peasants’ resistance to forced collectivization intensified. Peasant vengeance was typically directed not against the initiators of collectivization but its petty executors, such as activists, village leaders, party members, and so forth. According to general estimates, there were forty thousand peasant insurgents in Ukraine in 1930.<sup>36</sup> In this connection, the Western student of the Holodomor Andrea Graziosi has noted that the first peasant-based movement for national and social liberation in the twentieth century arose here but did not, unfortunately, reach its logical culmination in the early 1930s.<sup>37</sup>

Above all, the main goal of the Soviet government was to crush the peasant’s spirit of freedom, drive out of his consciousness his sense of agency, and fill his soul with fear and submissiveness.

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<sup>32</sup> Testimony of H. M. Panchenko, b. 1927, village of Ozerna, Bila Tserkva raion, Kyiv oblast. Arkhiv Natsional'noho muzeiu “Memorial zhertv Holodomoru” (Kyiv).

<sup>33</sup> I. Rybak, “Kolektyvizatsiia na Podilli,” in *Podil's'ka starovyna: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats'* (Vinnytsia, 1993), 222.

<sup>34</sup> 33-ii: *Holod*, 545.

<sup>35</sup> O. Hanzha, *Opir selian stanovlenniu totalitarnoho rezhymu v URSR* (Kyiv, 1996), 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Chorna tin' holodomoru 1932–1933 rokiv nad Ternopilliam: Knyha pam'iaty*, comp. B. Lanovyk et al. (Ternopil, 2003), 12.

<sup>37</sup> A. Gratsiozi [Graziosi], *Velikaia krest'ianskaia voina v SSSR: Bol'sheviki i krest'iane, 1917–1933* (Moscow, 2001).

In contrast to previous years, during the Holodomor of 1932–33 the peasantry was so intimidated and spiritually broken that some eyewitnesses mention having a sense of guilt for not wanting to join the collective farm.<sup>38</sup> Thus, owing to their fear, the peasants' resistance was becoming mostly passive: for example, they concealed food, mixed grain with earth, hid unthreshed grain in straw, and so on. Eyewitnesses say that the peasants lacked the strength to defend themselves; they only wept and pleaded.

By the early months of 1933, the will of many peasants was broken. According to the historian P.I. Sobol, the primary cause of this was hunger, since prolonged starvation diminishes a person's active efforts and will to survive, to resist aggressive social surroundings (especially the actions of the authorities).<sup>39</sup>

The Soviet authorities' brutal, repressive policies resulted in the destruction of those masses of Ukraine's peasantry who were vitally important producers of agricultural output and representatives of the finest managerial and labor traditions associated with Ukrainian village life. Those who joined collective farms—by force, in the majority of cases—were middle and poor peasants, among whom a new social hierarchy was being constructed. A new type of rural worker began to appear in the countryside: the collective farm worker, with all his or her concomitant features. Between 88 and 90 percent of the entire able-bodied population of Ukrainian collective farms, by far the most typical and numerous group of Ukrainian farmers, were of this type. It is noteworthy that the ideology instilled in collective-farm members was already somewhat different from that of independent farmers. For example, the new saying, "In order to disregard the *mezha* [boundary], you have to join the collective,"<sup>40</sup> is the clearest example of the Bolsheviks' collective farming ideology.

Collectivization and the Holodomor of 1932–33 also led to another negative change: the destruction of the family. First of all, an immense number of families were broken up. Some family members who were deported left behind small children and elderly relatives unable to work and fend for themselves. Thus, one more family tradition that had existed prior to collectivization and the Holodomor was disappearing: care for the elderly.

Second, able-bodied men and women left their families to search for food. Eyewitness testimonies reveal that many of them never returned but died en route or were arrested, and their children were left with grandparents who, more often than not, could not themselves endure starvation and died.

Prior to collectivization, children in traditional Ukrainian peasant society were never held legally responsible for their parents' actions. The Soviet system changed even this custom. Children who were branded as "kulak offspring" were deported together with their parents or placed in orphanages. Furthermore, government officials often urged teenaged children to renounce their parents, thereby saving themselves from deportation to Siberia. Such conditions

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<sup>38</sup> *Holodovka: 1932–1933 roky na Pereiaslavshchyni: Svidchennia*, comp. Iu. Avramenko and V. Hnatiuk (Pereiaslav-Khmelnytskyi, 2000), 116–17.

<sup>39</sup> P. Sobol', "Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv: osoblyvosti sotsial'nykh patolohii," in *Holodomor 1932–1933 rokiv iak velychezna trahediia ukraïns'koho narodu: Materialy Vseukraïns'koï naukovoïkonferentsii*, Kyiv, 15 lystop., 2002 (Kyiv, 2003), 171.

<sup>40</sup> RF IMFE NANU, f. 9, spr. 29, ark. 58.

were created in order to force children to adopt the most amoral motive possible for the dissolution of families—disowning one’s parents.

The formation of the Soviet system’s “new man” entailed the contradiction of the Ukrainian people’s accumulated spiritual values with regard to morality and socialization alike. For example, a presentation “On Particular Negative Aspects in the Work of Raions on the Expulsion of Kulaks,” given on 5 April 1931 by a district instructor (*okrinstruktor*) of the CC CP(B)U, lists the following pointers concerning children: “If the son or daughter of a kulak who are subject to expulsion together with their entire family were recently members of a Pioneer group or connected with the Komsomol, were activists, and declare that they wish to break with their father, and the village soviet is aware that this is a genuine desire, such a son or daughter up to the age of 16 can be left on their own...at the same time, these children will have to announce their renunciation of their parents at a mass meeting or openly through the press, etc.”<sup>41</sup> In general, the value of family ties was deformed by the Bolshevik regime in the early 1930s.

The communist authorities’ every action was thus designed to pit children against their families. Such age-old popular values as compassion, humaneness, and respect for elders were condemned. Thus, any behavior that went beyond the bounds of the permissible, in keeping with totalitarian ideology, was considered a “vestige of the past.” Furthermore, nihilistic attitudes among young people were encouraged. It became shameful to call oneself a Ukrainian, and people were encouraged to adopt the concept of the “Soviet person.” Youth became spiritually impoverished, which helped the authorities manipulate the consciousness of the rising generation. Ditties such as the following were widespread in those years: “Why do I need a father, why do I need a mother? / Better that I listen to Stalin.”<sup>42</sup>

Entire generations were thus spiritually enserfed, and the connection between them was lost. In brief instructions “on expulsion,” we read: “Under no circumstances are leave-takings to be permitted before the departure of relatives, acquaintances, and friends.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, by way of deliberate destruction, the people’s code of ethics and morality was dealt a tragic blow. The venerable traits of the Ukrainian people, such as friendliness, respectfulness, sensitivity, and kindness remained a thing of the past for many years. In implementing terror by famine, the Bolshevik authorities fostered indifference in the peasant and destroyed his sense of family affiliation. This is illustrated by a special report drafted by the authorized GPU representative for Ruzhyn county concerning the mood of the peasants: “If, for the first deportation at loading points there was a larger crowd of relatives who, at the moment of loading, were kicking up a fuss and screaming, then for this deportation a wholly insignificant number of relatives, having arrived at the station, are standing in utter calm some distance away; judging by the conversation, one may conclude that they regard the deportation with complete indifference.”<sup>44</sup> In the ideological interests of the Communist Party leadership, the spiritual values of the Ukrainian people were held in contempt, and a nihilistic attitude toward them was imposed. As such, a demoralized and morally crushed society submits more quickly and will continue to carry out the authorities’ every whim.

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<sup>41</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, spr. 4277, ark. 31.

<sup>42</sup> RF IMFE NANU, f. 8, spr. 324, ark. 10.

<sup>43</sup> TsDAHOU, f. 1, spr. 4277, ark. 50.

<sup>44</sup> *Holodomor na Zhytomyrshchyni 1930–1934: Dokumenty i spohady: Zbirnyk* (Zhytomyr: Zhytomyrs'kyi visnyk, 1993), 15.

One of the consequences of the Holodomor of 1932–33 was the destruction of the structure of family-based rites. The Soviet government instituted a strict ban on rituals associated with birth and the observance of baptism. By the early phase of collectivization, most peasants had already ceased to practice the rituals connected with the birth of a child so as not to invoke the wrath of officialdom. Women stopped following the traditional code of behavior prior to childbirth. Subsequently, the structure of rites, such as the birth of a child (visiting the newborn) and the child's first haircut (after one year), was deformed. It should be noted that, despite the harsh ban, people still tried to baptize their children at all costs.

Both collectivization and the Holodomor of 1932–33 inflicted substantial damage on the wedding ritual, whose very structure was distorted. Some aspects disappeared altogether, to be replaced by new ones. A new type of marriage, called "getting together," appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Other versions included the notion of "people being brought together." After collectivization, many peasants did not have any kind of wedding and merely undertook a civil procedure at a registry office, with no celebration afterward.

By the time the wedding ritual was revived in the Ukrainian countryside, many of its elements were already lost.

The burial rite, part of the set of family-based rituals, is an important stage during which the soul of the deceased departs to the world of his or her ancestors. By midwinter of 1932–33, when people were beginning to die en masse, funerals according to the traditional rituals were no longer being held. The enfeebled peasantry was physically unable to maintain the funeral rites. When people were no longer able to prepare coffins, the dead were buried in chests and boxes, and later without benefit of any kind of container.

Certain elements of the burial rite were banned outright. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the presence of a priest at a funeral was strictly forbidden. Government functionaries were categorically forbidden to attend such rites. There was also a ban on visiting the grave of a deceased, even if s/he were a relative. During the Holodomor a considerable number of elements associated with burial rites simply disappeared and were supplanted by new ones, for example, the presence of brass bands at funerals.

In the late 1920s, the destruction of traditional Ukrainian folkways and the introduction of a new Soviet culture represented a special way of influencing people's thinking patterns. Folk holidays and rituals began to be regarded as superstitions and vestiges of the past that impeded overall cultural development and socialist construction.

Since religion was one of the key components of Ukrainian peasant culture, its destruction along with that of religion became the major priority of the Soviet communist state. Throughout Ukraine bells were removed from churches, ostensibly for the needs of industrialization, and churches were demolished in order to remove them as focal points of peasant culture. New types of cultural and educational institutions were created in villages: clubs, village buildings, reading rooms, collective farm buildings, and the like. Most of them were housed in former churches.

Immense damage was inflicted on the most important part of the ritual life of Ukrainian peasant culture: calendar feast days (Christmas and Easter, church feast days, Sunday services,

etc.). Official sources and eyewitness accounts testify to the state persecution of popular rituals of the folk calendar cycle. The goal of these bans was to force the peasants to stop respecting and practicing any Christian rites and rituals whatever.

During religious holidays, various antireligious discussions, lectures, and exhibitions were held in the newly created cultural and educational establishments. As a rule, these “lectures” were not grounded in scholarship and came down to brutal harangues and boorish mockery of what were regarded as divine laws and the ancient traditions of the people.

The totalitarian regime decided what constituted holidays, proclaiming them truly “popular” ones. One of the new celebrations was “International Workers’ Day,” or May Day. In keeping with a decision of the CEC of the USSR, from 1928 May Day was celebrated over the course of two days, 1 and 2 May.

Some Soviet holidays, owing to their forcibly imposed origins, took root in society and remained firmly entrenched for many years. Some of them, albeit without their ideological coloration, are celebrated to this day. For example, so-called May Day meetings are still widespread in the Ukrainian countryside, and the international communist 8 March holiday, instituted in 1932, is celebrated throughout Ukraine as International Women’s Day.

Prior to collectivization, craftsmen and skilled workmen of all occupations were commonplace in peasant families. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Soviet authorities created cooperatives and workmen’s cooperative associations, and with the aid of taxes and terror they conducted agitation among handicraftsmen and skilled workers in order to have them join these collectives.

The intensifying pressure on handicraftsmen, the lack and poor quality of raw materials, the mismanagement of the administrations of workmen’s cooperative associations, as well as high taxes alienated skilled workmen. In 1932 this led to the dismissal of a large number of skilled workmen from cooperatives and workmen’s cooperative associations, and trades ceased to be handed down from one generation to the next. An unnatural decline took place in the skilled trades. Many trades and crafts managed to exist somehow for a few more decades, but eventually they, too, faded owing to an increasing demand for factory-made products. Collectivization and the Holodomor put an end to many crucial national trades and crafts that were almost completely wiped out in the Ukrainian countryside.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Ukraine’s rural regions were rendered so lifeless, both physically and morally, that they were powerless to mount resistance. The entire value system of the Ukrainian people was deformed, and age-old customs and traditions were eliminated by force.

*Translated from the Ukrainian by Marta D. Olynyk*